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ABSTRACT

The five observational studies reported in this paper provide consistent and interlocking testimony for the view that moral events differ qualitatively from social conventional events, and that these two aspects of the social world are associated with qualitatively differing individual-environment interactions. Each of the five studies focuses on social interactions revolving around transgressions or cultural breaches and individuals' attempts to repair breaches. Observations were made in school settings among preschool teachers and children in the United States and the Virgin Islands, among elementary school students in Chicago, and in free-play settings on playgrounds. All of the studies provide support for the proposal that morality and convention constitute aspects of distinct conceptual and developmental systems. In particular, the findings indicate that social interactions in the context of moral events stem from the intrinsic features of acts as they affect the rights or well-being of others, while interactions in the context of conventions focus on aspects of the social order. In conclusion, it is urged that, as social developmental research is largely conducted in a constricted range of social contexts, one high priority of future research should be the extension of observational studies to the examination of social interactions in a number of varied cultural settings. (Author/RH)

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Forms of Social Interaction and Domains of Social Understanding

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The study of conceptual development is in large measure the process of accounting for the genesis of cognitive structure (Piaget, 1968, 1970a, 1970b). From the constructivist position genesis entails the formation and transformation of cognitive structure by the subject out of the individual's interactions with objects or environmental events (Piaget 1970a). If one accepts this basic proposition it can be seen that an elucidation of the nature of cognitive development cannot focus simply on the conceptual outcomes themselves, but must also entail an analysis of the form of environmental interactions which constitute the bases from which conceptual systems are constructed. This does not imply a simple reductionism in which the description of environmental events supplants the analysis of conceptual products (as one might do from a strict associationist position). What it does suggest is that the study of cognitive development is most efficacious when the two aspects of analysis (i.e., environmental, conceptual) inform one another as part of a synergistic methodology.

In this paper I will examine the implications for such a synergistic approach to research on the development of social concepts which emerge from the proposal (Turiel 1978, forthcoming) that social concepts develop within distinct structural systems. The paper summarizes existing data supporting the proposition that qualitatively differing forms of the individual's social interactions correspond to the emergence of concepts in qualitatively differing conceptual domains (Turiel 1975). On the basis of those findings and related theory I shall present the argument that analyses of children's social interactions, from a conceptual domain perspective, presents a profitable route toward defining (a) the content and boundaries of social conceptual systems, and (b) the experiential factors contributing to the development of social concepts.

Defining Social Cognitive Domains: The Moral and Social Conventional

Thus far three domains of social concepts have been identified: the moral (knowledge of justice, ethics), the societal (knowledge of social systems), and the psychological (knowledge of persons, the causes of behavior). (Turiel 1978, forthcoming). Research examining the relations between social concepts and social interactions, however, has largely been confined to studies in the moral and societal domains. These studies have investigated the forms of social interactions associated with the development of conceptions of morality and social convention. To begin our consideration of this research let's examine the attributes of two social events which typify actions in each the moral and social conventional domains. The events described are taken from data Maria Nucci and I gathered in observations of social interactions occurring in fifth grade school settings (Nucci & Nucci, unpublished manuscript).

Event 1

During the luncheon recess, two second grade girls are playing with a jump rope that one of them had brought to school. A group of three larger fifth grade girls go over to the younger children and start to take the jump rope away from them. The two younger girls struggle to keep the rope. One of them is crying "It's mine - it's mine." The older girls win the struggle and begin playing jump rope. A teacher observing the event goes over to the older girls and says "Give them back their rope. How would you like it if I invited a couple of seventh graders over to pull that on you some time?"

Event 2

A girl wearing a skirt is sitting in the classroom with her legs crossed such that the ankle of one leg is resting on

Event 2 (cont'd)

the knee of the other (in boy fashion). The teacher seeing this says "Cindy - that's not the way to cross your legs. It's not lady-like. Cross them like that." (Teacher points to a girl whose legs are crossed at the knees).

As we look at these two events, it is apparent that they are both social in nature. In addition, both events entail social transgressions; responded to as such by adult authority. Beneath these points of commonality, however, there are substantive differences which distinguish these two forms of transgression. For one thing Event 1 has a victim while Event 2 does not. That is, the sequence of occurrences in Event 1 result in harm and an injustice perpetrated by one person (in this case a group of persons) against another. As one consequence of taking of the rope from its owner, the victim experienced and expressed (through crying, struggling, and statements of protest) her pain and unhappiness with the act.

In contrast the transgression in Event 2 has no personal victim. That is the girl's act of crossing her legs has no adverse impact, in and of itself, upon another person. Instead, the act was wrong because it was "unlady-like." The act was not in accordance with societal norms regarding appropriate sex role behavior.

In constructing a set of concepts to account for the occurrences in Event 1, the child's focus is upon an action sequence with intrinsic consequences for the well-being of another. Thus, Turiel(forthcoming) suggests the child may construct a set of prescriptions about such an act through abstractions from the experience itself, rather than from knowledge of societal norms, adult admonishments, or observations of role models. Such prescriptions result from the coordination of two primary perceptions of the event: (a) the resulting consequences to the victim (i.e. the loss

of personal property and attendant emotional upset), and (b) the perpetrators' reasons for engaging in the act. Furthermore, Turiel (forthcoming) states that one of the ways children may form judgments of moral necessity regarding such actions is through a comparison of engagement in the act with its non-occurrence. If the constructed consequences of its non-occurrence (e.g., the victim is not made unhappy, does not experience loss) is judged to be more desirable than the consequences of its occurrence, then the child will draw conclusions regarding how people ought to act in such circumstances (e.g., people ought not to steal from one another). In this manner, Turiel suggests, children construct their judgements about moral concerns for justice and right.

In contrast to the types of (moral) actions typified by Event 1, the transgression status of the act presented in Event 2 has no intrinsically prescriptive basis. That is, there is no intrinsic basis for the culture or cultural sub-unit (e.g., the school) to prescribe that boys ought to cross their legs in one fashion and girls in another. If we look at how the girl in Event 2 might view the act and its alternatives, we can see that it is unlikely that she would view one way of crossing her legs as inherently better than the other. Thus, the child's conception of the right and wrong of actions like those presented in Event 2 cannot come from abstractions from experience with the acts themselves. The source of the child's knowledge about the shoulds and oughts of such actions is the culture. In Event 2, the sequence of occurrences resulted in an agent of social transmission (the teacher) pointing out both the girls' social error, and an example of culturally approved behavior. The child's conceptions of prescriptions about such conventional behaviors, then, comes not from abstractions from experiences with the act, but rather from abstractions from experiences surrounding the normative status of actions (e.g., rules,

adult directives). The child's comprehension of the basis and purpose of convention is a function of her understanding of the structure and function of social systems (Turiel 1975, 1978).

During the past five years a number of studies have appeared which support the position that concepts about morality and convention constitute distinct conceptual and developmental systems. These studies have demonstrated that subjects at all ages discriminate between moral and conventional events on the basis of several criteria. Transgression seriousness, rule importance, rule changeability, act relativity, and the perceived relative goodness of prosocial behaviors in the two domains (Damon 1977; Nucci in press; Nucci & Turiel 1978; Nucci & Nucci 1979; Nucci, Turiel & Gawrych 1980; Smetana 1980a, 1980b; Turiel 1975; Turiel 1978b; Weston & Turiel 1980). In addition, the sequence of changes in conceptions of morality and convention have been found to follow qualitatively differing and independent developmental patterns (Damon 1977; Farrar & Turiel 1979; Turiel 1978a, 1979).

These findings are in contrast with earlier views (Piaget 1932; Kohlberg 1969) which hold that the conceptual distinction between morality and convention emerges only in the later stages of moral development, which entail the differentiation of the moral (justice) from other non-moral (e.g., conventional, prudential) concerns. It is interesting in light of the ease of analysis of the distinctive attributes of moral and conventional events and the considerable amount of research which has been generated in support of the distinct domains hypothesis, that more than forty years of cognitive-developmental research on moral judgment passed before convention and morality were proposed as separate systems. My own explanation for this set of circumstances is that developmental theorists and researchers who in the 1950's picked up the study of moral development from where Piaget left

off in 1932, did not go back and directly examine the forms of social environmental events from which moral and conventional events are constructed. That is, a basic aspect of constructivist analysis of developmental processes (i.e., the delineation of categories of social objects and events) was overlooked in the study of social cognitive growth. Piaget's own analyses of the development of knowledge about the physical world, however, included such domain distinctions (Piaget & Inhelder 1969). It is ironic that the initial proposal that convention and morality constitute distinct conceptual systems (Turiel 1975) did not emerge from efforts to conduct such an analysis of the social world and corresponding conceptual systems, but instead grew out of efforts to explain a series of apparent developmental contradictions in the transition from conventional to principled forms of moral reasoning in the Kohlbergian system (Turiel 1974). Having said that, let's turn now to an examination of those studies which have looked at the forms of social interactions associated with the development of moral and conventional concepts.

Studies of Social Interactions in the Context of Moral and Conventional Events

There have been five studies which have recorded the nature of social interactions in the two domains. Each of these studies focused on the social interactions revolving around transgressions. The decision to focus on transgressions stemmed from two pragmatic judgments. One was the view that transgressions constitute a major context in which social information is provided to the individual. It is through reactions to cultural breaches and attempts to repair breaches that social actors convey a great deal of information regarding the basis for particular social standards. In the context of a transgression aspects of such information is provided the transgressor, victim, and observer-bystander. Thus, it was felt that observation of responses to transgression would afford a rich opportunity to

observe the distinctive features of moral and conventional social interactions. A second reason for focusing on transgressions is that it is only when conventional breaches are responded to that an investigator/observer can be certain that a given convention is in effect in the particular social setting.

Preschool Studies

Studies in United States settings. The first of these studies (Nucci & Turiel 1978) observed the responses of teachers and children to social transgressions which occurred in ten pre-schools. Events defined as moral were those, which like Event 1 described earlier, entailed transgressions which resulted in harm or injustice to another person (e.g., hitting and hurting, stealing). Events defined as conventional, like Event 2 described earlier, entailed transgressions of arbitarily designated standards for behavior (e.g., rules about table manners, designated play areas, modes of dress, sex role behaviors). In addition to observations of child and teacher responses to transgressions, the procedure included interviews of children about actual events that they had observed. The interview, by determining whether the children viewed events as entailing moral and conventional violations, permitted us to both (a) determine whether such young children discriminated between moral and conventional acts, and (b) determine whether the observed social interactions corresponded to the children's interpretations of events as moral or conventional.

Results of the interviews demonstrated that the pre-school children did indeed discriminate among moral and conventional events. Their classification of events was in agreement with our event classifications in over 80 percent of the cases. Our observations of transgressions revealed that the responses were of two types: those focusing on the intrinsic consequences of actions, and those focusing on aspects of social order.

We found that both children and teachers responded to moral transgressions. Children often responded as the victims of such transgressions. Included within the children's responses were statements indicating the consequences of actions, such as the pain experienced or loss incurred. In addition, children reacted to moral transgressions through attempts at physical retaliation and through expressions of emotional states, such as anger or sadness. Finally, these young children occasionally sought out adults to address their grievances. Children did not respond to moral transgressions in terms of the social order. That is, they did not invoke rules, or social standards as the reasons for objecting to the acts.

Like the children, adults did not respond to moral transgressions through appeals to rules or normative expectations. Instead, adult responses pointed out to the transgressors the effects of their actions upon the victim, or encouraged the transgressor to consider the consequences of their acts themselves. In addition, the teachers provided reasons for objections to their behaviors in terms of the negative consequences of the acts upon others.

The children in this initial study were not observed responding to violations of conventions. However, the adults frequently did so. These interactions primarily revolved around the social regulations of the school. Teachers responded to violations of conventional standards with statements specifying school rules, by invoking sanction and with direct commands to refrain from norm violating behavior.

In this study, then, the interactions surrounding moral events took a form which differed from the interaction in the context of conventional

violations. In accord with our analysis of the features of moral and conventional acts, the responses to moral violations focused on features intrinsic to the acts (i.e., harm or injustice to persons), while responses to conventional transgressions focused on aspects of the social order (e.g., rules, norms). Though this study did not provide evidence of the nature of children's responses to conventional transgression, the results from two subsequent studies included such interactions.

The first of these was conducted by Much and Shweder (1978), who observed social interactions in nursery and kindergarten settings. Their procedure was somewhat different from the Nucci & Turiel (1978) study in that they performed linguistic analyses of naturally occurring verbal interactions in the context of transgressions of school regulations, general conventions, and moral precepts. Other methodological differences between this study and the Nucci and Turiel (1978) study were that Much and Shweder did not conduct interviews of children about the observed events, and their observations were of interactions within a single school over an extended period of time, rather than brief visits to a number of schools.

Largely as a result of this latter procedural feature, Much and Shweder observed children's responses to conventional violations as well as moral events. Their findings revealed that, although the preschool children responded to violations of general convention (e.g., violations of gender norms), the children did not respond to violations of school specific regulations. Responses to violations of school regulations came almost entirely from the adults. As in the Nucci and Turiel study, Much and Shweder found that the form of social interactions surrounding social events varied with the domain of the transgression. That is, the linguistic bouts (accusations of transgression, and defenses) of both children and adults, depended on whether the transgression was in the moral or conventional

domain. The exchanges surrounding violations of conventions or school regulations dealt primarily with the social context and rules. The exchanges surrounding moral transgressions primarily focused on the actions themselves.

Thus, the Much and Shweder, and Nucci and Turiel studies provided evidence that young children experience different forms of social interactions in the context of moral and conventional events in consonance with the distinctions we have drawn between the two domains. In a subsequent study, (Nucci, Turiel & Gawrych 1980) we were able to demonstrate that the observed differences between moral and conventional interactions were not restricted to social contexts within U.S. mainland culture.

Cross-cultural Observations. In that study we observed the responses which teachers and children provided to transgressions in ten preschools on the island of St. Croix in the Virgin Islands. The procedures we employed were identical to those in our initial study (Nucci & Turiel 1978) with the exception that we increased the observation time fifty percent per site over that of our U.S. study. As a result we were able to observe children's responses to conventional as well as moral violations.

The results of our observations in St. Croix essentially replicated those of the previous observational studies conducted with preschool subjects in the United States. We found (a) that the children reliably discriminated between the moral and conventional events they observed; and (b) that the responses of both adults and children to social conventional events differed from their responses to moral events. The patterns of observed responses were consonant with the domains of the transgressions. As in the Much and Shweder (1978) study, both children and adults responded to moral transgressions and violations of general conventions. Almost all responses to conventional school regulations, however, came from adults.

The outcomes of this study indicate that the observed differences between moral and conventional interactions are not peculiar to United States culture. Before we can make more general statements regarding the cross-cultural nature of moral and conventional events, however, other research will need to be conducted among a number of disparate cultures and cultural groups.

Explanations for Why Young Children Don't Respond to Transgressions of Conventional School Regulations. The three studies reported thus far all examined social interactions in contexts with young children. One of the consistent findings reported was that these young children do not respond to violations of conventional school regulations. Two interpretations of this finding have been offered. According to Much and Shweder, the observed differences between children's responses to conventions, and the absence of such responses to school regulations is to be interpreted as supportive of the proposition that convention is distinct from regulation. "We believe that the observed differential speaks for the distinction between these two [convention, regulation] domains" (Much & Shweder 1978, pg. 34).

The alternative view holds that regulations do not form a distinct conceptual or experiential domain, but rather a means for codifying moral prescriptions or conventional uniformities (Turiel 1978b; Weston & Turiel 1980). Thus, there are moral as well as conventional regulations. Accordingly a number of studies (Smetana 1980b; Turiel 1978b; Weston & Turiel 1980) have shown that children's conceptions of regulations are not uniform, but vary as a function of the moral or conventional form of regulations. From this perspective one would predict that preschool children make the same sorts of discriminations between moral and conventional behaviors governed by school regulations as they do to other non-codified moral or conventional behaviors.

Findings from the interview portions of our preschool studies (Nucci & Turiel 1979; Nucci, Turiel & Gawrych 1980) are consistent with that hypothesis. We found that in over 80 percent of the cases the children viewed moral transgressions as wrong whether or not a school regulation was in effect. In contrast, in over 80 percent of the case, conventional acts were viewed as wrong only if a consensual norm or school regulation was in effect. Our interpretation of the lack of preschool children responses to violations of conventional school regulations is not based on the view that such rules constitute a qualitatively differing conceptual dimension from general conventions, but that such rules, because of their institutional specificity, are not viewed by preschool children as important to the coordination of their social interactions. It follows, therefore, that one should see child responses to violations of conventional school regulations at later ages as a function of their developing under standing of the organizational function of such institutional regulations. This hypothesis was born out in an observational study Maria Nucci and I conducted of the social interactions of second, fifth, and seventh grade children.

Studies With Older Children

School Settings. The study was conducted in ten public schools in the near-west suburbs of Chicago. Our procedures were adapted from the earlier preschool observational studies (Nucci & Turiel 1978). We found that unlike preschool age children, the children at these older ages responded to transgressions of conventional school regulations (i.e., classroom and playground regulations). The tendency to respond showed a significant increase between the second and fifth grades; remaining at this increased frequency at grade seven. These findings suggest that as children become older, they become more likely to actively engage in maintaining the social

order of established institutions (e.g., schools). The significant increase in response tendency between grades two and five corresponds to the emergence at about age ten of the child's (Level 3) "affirmation of social convention based on concrete conceptions of social systems" (Turiel 1978a). Thus we may see evidence of a correspondence between changes in the child's behavior in the context of conventional events and the development of conceptions of social organization.

Children at each age responded to social conventional transgressions with commands to either refrain from norm violating behaviors or to engage in normative behavior, statements of rules governing actions, and statements ridiculing the transgressor. Children's use of rule statements decreased with age, while the use of ridicule responses to conventional events increased with age. This suggests, that as children get older, they are less likely to assume that the transgressor requires information regarding the nature of governing conventions, and hence, are more likely to use personal attacks on the transgressor to achieve social conformity.

The children in this study also responded to moral transgressions. Communications between the children regarding moral violations often entailed statements about the injury or loss experienced by the victim, and sometimes included evaluations of the transgression as unjust. Children also responded by requesting that the transgressor consider how it would feel to be the victim of the transgression. As with preschool children, the younger children in this study (second grade) responded to moral transgressions with requests for adult intervention. This form of response, however, dropped out with increasing age. At all ages the children responded to moral transgressions with retaliatory acts against the transgressor. This form of response increased in frequency with age, and seemed to offset the reduction

with age in the number of child requests for adult intervention in moral events.

As in the preschool studies, the form of teacher responses complemented those provided by children. Responses to violations of convention were of the social organizational type: specifications and reminders of rules, statements regarding the disruptive or deviant nature of the acts, and directives to engage in normative behavior. Teacher responses to moral transgressions focused on the unjust or hurtful consequences of actions.

In sum, the findings of this study as in the others show that the forms of social interaction experienced by children and young adolescents differ by domain. At the same time, this study demonstrated that changes occur with age in the pattern of each set of interactions.

Each of the studies reviewed to this point has examined interactions in school settings. While presenting a consistent set of findings supportive of the notion that social interactions experienced by children differ according to domain, it is still necessary to conduct observations in other contexts (e.g., church, family, peer clique) to determine the scope of relations between social concepts and their moral or conventional experiential antecedants. We have recently begun to extend our observations to other contexts. Those observations focused on social interactions among children in free-play settings. We began with free-play settings to determine if children's responses to transgression continued to differ by domain when occurring out of the purview of adult authority and institutions.

Observations in Free-play Settings. In this study observations were conducted of children's responses to moral and conventional violations in playgrounds. Observations were made of children's activities in the context

free-play only. We did not record breaches occurring in the context of institutionalized cultural games (e.g., little league baseball, football). As an illustrative example, in Winter months our observations focused on such activities as sledding. We divided our observations between two age groups: children approximately seven to ten years of age, and children about eleven to fourteen years old. Results of the study were in accord with the distinction between morality and convention, and paralleled results of observations in school settings. We found that children responded to moral transgressions by providing statements of injury or loss, by evaluations of acts as unfair or hurtful, and by acts of retaliation. We also observed that transgressors often reacted to such feedback by efforts to compensate for the harm done, or by direct apologies for their acts. Thus, the interactions surrounding moral transgressions in these settings as in schools focused on the intrinsic features of the act.

The children in these settings also responded to conventional violations. Thus it is evident that children acknowledge the importance of conventional uniformities for the organization of their play interactions. Children responded to breaches of conventions with reference to rules, evaluations of acts as deviant or disruptive, and with statements ridiculing the transgressor. As in school settings, then, responses to conventions focused on normative regularities and efforts to get transgressors to comply with shared expectations of behavioral uniformities.

Summary and Conclusions

To summarize, the five observational studies presented in this paper provide consistent and interlocking testimony for the view that moral events differ qualitatively from social conventional events, and that these two aspects of the social world are associated with qualitatively differing

individual - environment interactions. We have seen that social interactions in the context of moral events stem from the intrinsic features of acts as they impact upon the rights or well-being of others. Interactions in the context of conventions, in contrast, focus on aspects of the social order. We observed similar patterns of interaction in school and playground settings, in American and non-U.S. cultures, on preschools, and among children and between children and adults, in later grades. In addition we have seen that age changes in specific patterns of interaction in the context of conventions correspond to conceptual changes in the conventional (societal) domain.

In these ways our observations provide support for the proposal that morality and convention constitute aspects of distinct conceptual and developmental systems. Our willingness to accept this conclusion does not stem simply from our analysis of environmental events. Had we taken that approach, we might well have concluded that Much and Shweder's (1978) distinction between convention and regulation be accorded a corresponding set of distinctions among conceptual systems. Instead our analysis of social concepts was in turn supported and informed by studies of the structure of social concepts. It is in this way that our approach has attempted to subscribe the methodological synergism required by structualist theory.

It is almost a cliche of social research, but nonetheless true, that what has been done is but an introduction to what remains to be accomplished. It is immediately apparent, for example, that current assumptions about the nature of social events associated with the development of moral and conventional concepts are based on studies conducted in a rather constricted range of social contexts. One priority of future research, it seems, should

be the extension of observational studies to the examination of social interactions in a number of varied cultural settings. As I suggested earlier these extensions should include the analysis of interactions in family, religion, and peer group contexts. In addition, future work should include analyses of the forms of moral and conventional interactions in societies whose conventional systems are progressively different from our own. Through such studies we will be able to refine the definitions of social cognitive structures, and to assess the universality of the distinctions we have drawn.

In addition, future research should extend our initial efforts at examining the age-related changes in the patterns of moral and conventional interactions. Points of departure are suggested by studies of infant-mother interactions (see Shaffer and Crook 1978, for a review) which provide promise of illuminating the nature of the child's earliest conventional and moral exchanges.

Though I have limited this discussion to an examination of research on social interactions in the moral and conventional domains, it should be apparent that similar analyses need be conducted of the social interactions associated with the construction of social concepts in other domains as well. Within the psychological domain, for instance, studies of infant interactions with mirrors, and with strangers (Lewis & Brooks 1974) may provide a point of departure for the study of social interactions associated with the construction of notions of self.

One could continue proposing future avenues of study, and I am confident that developmental researchers will. To do so, however, researchers from the conceptual domain perspective will have to address themselves to the thorny question of how individuals construct their understandings of events which may be conceptualized as content for more than one domain. Each of the

studies I reported earlier, as a heuristic device, chose to ignore the systematic examination of such overlapping events. My colleague on this symposium Judith Smetana, addresses this issue in detail in her paper. Thus, I will not elaborate on this point. Instead I will conclude with a statement of faith and of reasoned conviction, that the study of conceptual development in the social realm must be consonant with the basic precepts of constructivist theory. To do that, developmental research must employ a paradigm that coordinates the analysis of cognitive structure with the examination of the form of and structure of social objects and events.

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